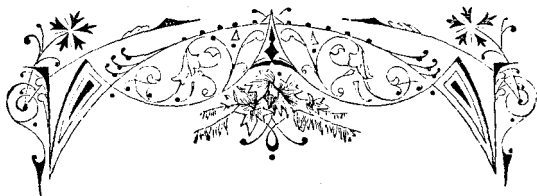


# *a community called ...*

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## THE GIFT OF PRAYER.

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*Christian.* You say you find great difficulty in prayer. Could you give me any thing like a clear account of the difficulty which you experience?

*Inquirer.* I am not sure that I can do so. There are many things that seem hard to me, and they make me sometimes doubt whether I am at all right yet.

*C.* Perhaps you could state your difficulties, and we might get over them one by one.

*I.* Well, for one thing, I cannot at all express myself in prayer as I ought. I have no gift in prayer.

*C.* And do you imagine that what is called

a gift of prayer is of any value in the sight of a prayer-hearing God ?

*I.* No: I do not think that exactly; and yet I feel great difficulty in uttering my mind, even in secret.

*C.* I think I can perceive where the most of your difficulty lies. Although you do not think that you are to be heard of God merely because of your much or good speaking, you probably do think that if you were able to utter yourself more fully and fluently it would be a better evidence of your being in a right state of mind.

*I.* I think that is just the state of the case.

*C.* Have you ever read of the Spirit making intercession for the saints "with groanings that cannot be uttered?" Rom. viii, 26.

*I.* I have.

*C.* Do you think that there will be much fluency in such groanings?

*I.* Certainly not.

*C.* Yet you see they occur in the case of *saints*, and that when the Spirit is leading them in their prayers "according to the will

of God." The great thing in prayer is to present your *desires* to God, and to give a good ground upon which you may be honorably answered.

*I.* I see the truth of what you say.

*C.* Still, I do not think it will fully remove your difficulty; it, however, leads to its removal. I have spoken of desiring an object from God, and seeking it on a right ground. Now, you have had your mind too much occupied with the mere *words*, and too little with the *object*, and the *ground* (John xiv, 13, 14; xvi, 23, 24) upon which you ask that object. Suppose that you imagined it to be your duty to go to some one, not to get any thing you wanted, but just to make a speech to him about nothing particular: would you not find difficulty in utterance?

*I.* I certainly would.

*C.* Suppose, however, that you felt very much in want of several things, and you knew a good ground upon which you might ask them all; if, in this case, you went to your friend to ask these things and to state your reason for

asking them, do you think you would find any difficulty in uttering your mind ?

*I.* Well, I believe I should not. I think I see where my error lies. I have looked upon prayer too much as a religious *exercise*, and not as a child's going to his father to get what he needs in answer to prayer.

*C.* I am glad you do see this. I cannot imagine you will ever find want of utterance in ordinary cases if you keep this in view. Just think of that which God has given you; thank him for it: think of what you need; ask him for it. But you said you had other difficulties.

*I.* Yes: I often experience great coldness of heart in prayer; I feel as if my soul were frozen with indifference, and I cannot get it righted sometimes. I feel totally shut out at these times from God; I have no access to him at all.

*C.* Do you think that when your emotions refuse to flow, and your soul is bound as it were in iron, that you have no access to God ?

*I.* Yes, I certainly think so. When I feel

so cold and backward, how can I pray acceptably?

*C.* You do not mean to say that you *wish* at these times to feel as you do?

*I.* No. I would give a great deal to get my heart to flow out in earnest desire and love, but it refuses to do so.

*C.* And is it your belief that at such times you are denied access to God?

*I.* I certainly think so. I cannot imagine that I have access to him then.

*C.* Then it must be the flow of feeling in our own hearts that gives us access to Him? Do you not think that we have access to the holiest of all "by the blood of Jesus," and not by the feelings of our own hearts? Heb. x, 19-23.

*I.* I see I must be wrong somehow. Would you explain my error?

*C.* It is this: You imagine that having access to God depends upon *your* feelings rather than upon *his*; and, consequently, when your feelings are wrong, you think you have no access to him. Moreover, you do not see

that the bound feelings of your heart, instead of keeping you back from God, constitute one pressing reason why you should come to him. Suppose that you had two children, and that one came to you with the liveliest emotion, while the other labored under the most chilling depression of heart: as a kind father, which of the two would meet with your tenderest welcome and kindest smile?

*A.* Certainly the one in depression.

*C.* Then suppose two men coming before God—the one with a great gift of speech and great liveliness of feeling, and the other under great difficulty from the fettering coldness of his own emotions, and all but dumb: to which of the two may we suppose Jehovah would most tenderly turn?

*A.* I see the matter as I never saw it before. I see clearly he would turn to the one having most need of his Divine welcome and aid.

*C.* I trust you may see it so as to make a practical use of it in removing the very coldness of which you complain. Suppose that the next time you come in secret prayer to

God this coldness should come over you, but you at once remember how kind and warm the welcome of your God is in spite of it all, where will your coldness be under such reflection?

*I.* I believe it will not continue long under it.

*C.* That is what we may aptly call placing the ice in the sun. Bask it well, and it will soon thaw. You were placing a cold heart in the pale rays of an imagined and distant God. It could never melt there. Now let me just suggest one thing that may have a great tendency to remove all your difficulties. Suppose that you entered your closet, and that you offered a prayer of an hour's length, without a wandering thought and with most heavenly feelings: would not your reflection be, "That's a grand prayer?"

*I.* Well, I dare say I might have a thought very like that.

*C.* Suppose, on the other hand, that you prayed with considerable difficulty and incoherence, but that you sought very precious blessings in the name of Jesus, and that you saw your imperfect prayer answered for Jesus'



name's sake: would you not *then* say, "What a grand plea that name of Jesus is! It makes even *my* otherwise worthless prayer to be accepted." Ezek. xxxvi, 22; Dan. ix, 18.

*I.* I see now my error. Indeed, the whole subject of prayer appears in a new light to my mind. My difficulties have all sprung from looking to *myself* and my *prayers*, instead of regarding the great realities you have afresh presented to my mind.

*U.* Well, I hope you will find benefit in thinking over these things. Keep the true character of God always in view, with the true ground of all access to him, and these will free you from a world of trial.

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No. 27.